

# Drama and Theatre Juxtaposed

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## Abstract

This paper is on ‘drama and theatre juxtaposed’. Drama is purely performance. This performance happens either on a stage, in an open space or wherever performer choose for it to happen. Theatre provides the stage. These days, people build theatre as it suits them. That is what can be termed the modern theatre. It is more beautiful, with required lights to provide the desired effects. Yet, it does not take away the fact that it all happens for drama to take place. The study aims to point out that drama and theatre are interwoven. Any attempt to separate them makes them appear incomplete as such, loses its relevance. It is discovered that without theatre there will be no drama and vice-versa.

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## 1. Introduction

In the words of Edward Bond, Drama is not theatre. To him Theatre is a vacuous (lack of content or vacant) commercial or essential trivial enterprise while drama transcends theatre’s vulgar origins and leaps into Art. Drama is a unique tool to explore and express human feelings. It is a specific mode of fiction represented in performance. It is also an essential form of behavior in all cultures, a fundamental human activity.

Aristotle in his words, says that drama is a criticism of life, on a stage with action, characters and dialogue. Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. It is also the enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors on a stage before an audience.

Plato claims that theatre is the distraction of the mind as it occurs to the expression of the feelings. From these definitions and explanations, it can be deduced that they have a very explicit relationship. While theatre involves different styles that involves the performers to be over dramatic be it farce or comedic or straight up dramatic theatre, Drama is lesser in nature. Theatre is a business, a lifestyle and something to entertain people with, drama is a style of theatre or a part of a style of theatre and most times are usually seen in schools.

For example, dance on its own and nature is drama and dramatic but the act of displaying or performing drama before an audience is regarded as theatre. In order words drama must be performed before it can be termed theatre. In Igbo traditional literature drama can take place at the village square or at the traditional ruler’s palace where spectators will sit around watch the drama, be it dance or festival being performed as theatre.

Theatre can be termed as a place where drama is performed before an organized audience. The audience is organized in the sense that there is a space for the performers to perform. The audience knows best not to be seen in this special space in order not to bring confusion on identifying the performers and the audience.

The traditional theatre can be said to be more organized because the people already know what they are expected to do at any given time. This way, drama is passed from one generation to another and the art of performance is learnt equally.

Brook (1968) says,

“...I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage.  
A man walks across this empty space whilst someone  
else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for  
an act of theatre to be engaged...”

This simply suggests that the only requirement for theatre is an audience, and an idea worthy of presenting. Nevertheless, not every gathering with an audience can be termed theatre, for example, a political debate, a lecture or a church opening. Although these require audience with interest in that field, nevertheless, the audience has little interest in making distinctions as long as they are entertained. When they complain about adventurous production it’s usually because of weakness in the execution and not the adventurousness itself.

This is to say that drama remains in its original form and becomes theatre when it is performed on a stage before an audience having all the elements of drama like focus, timing, sound, symbol, conflict, crises, tension, dialogue, language, mood, space, contrast and Rhythm. Therefore, drama is the imitation of nature (mimicking nature) while theatre is its presentation by actors on the stage.

## 2. The Relationship Between Drama And Theatre

The relationship between drama and theatre is juxtaposed into each other. The drama is the drama script while the theatre is the stage, its actual performance. Take for example, the various Nigerian drama series on the

television stations like *Clinic Matters*, *Papa Ajasco*, *This Life* etc would not be understood clearly by the audience if there were no actors and actresses (performers) to perform the drama. It would have remained a drama text which the audience (readers) would have to pick up and read. In this case, the target audience reached may not be as much as it would have been had the text been acted. This therefore means that, these drama series are able to be termed theatre because they are acted out either on the stage or location for viewing. Drama can not be termed theatre until it has been acted on a stage. Therefore their relation is symbiotic. They are dependent on each other for their proper usage.

### **3. Major Differences Between Modern And Traditional Theatre**

The differences between the two shall be looked into under six headings. They are therefore discussed accordingly below.

#### *3.1 Audience*

The audience of the traditional theatre are mostly the owners of the tradition being performed. Most times, they do not really have a choice to choose whether to attend or not rather they see it as their right where they are not expected to come in a special dressing. Secondly, the audience is closer to the actors either horizontally or vertically. The performers see the audience just as the audience see the performers, this is because there is no demarcation either imagery or physical between the performers and the audience. In modern theatre, the audience seat in rows on one side of the well and specially built stage. They observe. The audience has a clear understanding of the barrier between their space and the actors. This puts the audience in a state of 'reality', suspending his disbelief.

#### *3.2 Actor/Audience Relationship*

In a modern theatre, the actors do not acknowledge the audience. They talk and relate to each other exclusively. They are in the world of play, to address the audience would be to break the imagery wall, and obstruct the action and go away from character. In traditional theatre, everywhere the actor looked, there was audience. He could not talk to a fellow actor without seeing an audience member behind him.

#### *3.3 Status of Audience*

In modern theatre, status of the audience is significant in the prices of the seats in the theater. The expensive ones are closer to the stage while the cheap ones are those farther away from the stage. In traditional theatre, there were basically no seats; everybody sits where he/she can have a vintage view of the performance. It is not expensive.

#### *3.4 Production and Design*

In modern theatre, the scenery, costumes, lighting and sound, are designed by artists and constructed by craftsman to create the environment of the play, to represent place and time. The degree of naturalism, expressions and abstract are carefully calculated to tell the story of the play. It is more representational. In traditional theatre, the theatre was the scenery. The actors conjured the setting in the imaginations of the audience with minimal additions. The costumes were of current times even when portraying an ancient belief. There was also lots of music, played live by musicians or troops, it was more presentational.

#### *3.5 Rehearsals*

In modern theatre, the play is written and then rehearsed for weeks by the actors, directed by a director. There is room for character and characterization. Disguise comes into play if there is need for doubling. (Voice in reading letters in a play). In traditional theatre, plays are performed by a set of core actors. They regularly play multiple roles in a play. This is mostly in order to cut cost.

#### *3.6 Language and Rhetorics*

In modern theatre, the text is almost in prose. The lines appear as live. The idioms, styles and prosaic is intended to produce the sound of real life even if slightly funnier. The story and text is intended to be a slice of life. It is more representational. In traditional theatre, the play was designed as an argument with the characters fighting for the support of the audience. It debated points of views and was by nature more rhetorical. Most of the plays were in verse rather than in prose. The audience feels the heart beat of meter and breaths with the actors.

### **4. Major Procedures to be Taken Before Any Work of Literature be Termed A Drama**

Just like E.M. Foster said, the basis of every novel is a story. In the same vein, a drama cannot exist without a story. The procedures for drama can be listed as follows:

The story, Contrast, Conflict Character and Characterization, Mood, Climax, Tension, Space Timing, Language,

## Rhythm, Symbol

### *4.1 Story and character/characterization*

This can be seen as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. It tells the audience what happened and in what order. It is this time sequence that eventually terms a random collection of episodes into a drama. A good drama must have an element of suspense in its storyline which will compel the viewer or reader to show more interest in the piece of art. The script writer must wield her wand of suspense to grab the attention of a reader or viewer.

The chronological delivery of the story line is quite different from the live natural time. In real life, some experiences have greater values than others, so are their meanings. Values have no rules in a story, which is basically associated with time in life rather than life by values. A story line of drama must narrate events in the order they happened to avoid confusing the reader or viewer.

The story cannot, on the other hand exist without a script writer or an author of a drama book. The two persons are creative writers who turn a fictitious event into a creative work of art to entertain and educate an audience. The art of story writing or scriptwriting can also be said to be a work of a genius who paints a picture in his subconscious mind and puts it into writing. The writer also bears in mind to write chronologically the sequence of events.

A story for drama may not be written but the actors know before hand what to do at a particular time or occasion. Example; the Ohaofia War Dance, The Mm̄onw̄u Festival, The On̄u Festival of Ah̄jaba land in Ngwaland, which reveals a communal struggle for survival characterized by fishing and hunting. The Ihejiok̄u Festival celebrated to appreciate the god of the land for bringing forth a bountiful harvest of yam produce and so on. These traditional dramas do not have a written down story yet they are performed. This is because it is handed down from one generation to another though it can be written down in the future. Again, its storyline or pattern is also sequential, showing the chronology of events the way they happened before it was dramatized.

According to Aristotle, drama is a criticism of life, on a stage, with action, characters and dialogue. It is a composition in prose form that presents a story eventually in dialogue and action and written with the intention of its eventual performance before an audience. This is to say that there must be a story written down already and handed out to the performers for their digestion before eventually performing it.

Characters or actors are the performers in a dramatic art. They are the ones who give life to the written story and at the same time entertain the viewers or audience while doing so. A story line of a drama piece is useless if there are no characters to perform the story, be it written or performed on a stage.

Characterization on the other hand allows us to empathize with the chief character or other characters in the drama, thus allowing the viewer or audience to feel what the character is feeling as if it is in real life, it also gives the audience a sense of verisimilitude – thus makes us feel that what we are watching is actually true and no longer fiction.

It is the duty of a drama writer or a drama creator to make sure and correctly assign the proper roles to a character. Some actors or characters over time have become stereotype. This is so because they have mastered a particular role so well they cannot fit into another role. This means that such a character will not do so well when given another role to play in a drama. The creator will do well to recognize these stereotyped characters and make sure that they fit in well in their proper characters.

Every drama is intended to pass a message across to an intended target audience. The creator or writer tries to do this by making sure she paints her imaginative picture very well, and then assigns the best character to it. If this is not met, the idea of passing a message across will be defeated. This is mainly because the creator wants or assumes that the viewer or audience understands life or takes or accepts the idea in the drama exactly the way she sees it, as an individual. This can only be achieved if the characterization of the drama is done properly. An important part of characterization according to Karen Berbadó is Dialogue. He said that it is both spoken and inward dialogue that affords us the opportunity to see the characters' hearts and examine their motivations. This is true because the audience understands the drama better through listening to conversations between characters as they interpret their roles. These conversations can be verbal or non-verbal in the case of a character portraying or mimicking a deaf and dumb person. So, in the best of stories, it is basically characterization that moves the story along, this is because a good character in a difficult condition or position in the drama creates his or her own plot. He or she must not lose focus. This requires memorizing texts, words moves or gestures.

### *4.2 Tension*

This can be used interchangeably with conflict. The difference lies in the development of suspense in a performance. As the audience looks forward to certain outcomes in the plot, the tension builds. For instance, in the drama by Inno Nwadike *Onye Kpaa Nku Ahuhu* (1989), when Ikechukwu finally realized that he could not have any children until he goes to apologize to his ex-girl friend Amaka whom he impregnated while he was still in the university and rejected. The reader anticipates to know Amaka's response when Ikechukwu shall come to

beg for her forgiveness. As the reader anticipates the outcome of his visit, the tension builds. This development of tension normally parallels the advancement of the plot, leading to climax.

#### *4.3 Timing*

This refers to movement or gestures as it concerns drama performed on a stage. When performing, the use of the parts of body must be critically considered. This can be manipulated to create contrast in a scene or simply to demonstrate stylized or personalized or unnatural movements.

#### *4.4 Rhythm*

This is the timing and pace of the drama. It is the tempo of the performance. It should be as a rule of drama, rhythm should never be the same throughout the drama, notwithstanding its length. It can follow the emotional state of one or two or more characters or the atmosphere of the performance at a particular moment.

#### *4.5 Contrast*

Contrast if not properly used in a dramatic performance creates boredom and lack of tension. This is typical in a sad scene swiftly followed by a happy one, or a happy scene followed by a sad one, for example in Onyekaonwu's *Nwata Rie Awọ* (2004) where people gathered in Aworo's compound to celebrate his wife's pregnancy and recovery when all of a sudden his long lost wife Obioma walked in and it turned out that she is actually the mother of Oḍinchefu, Aworo's current wife. This led him to commit suicide.

Contrast can be created in a more subtle and sophisticated way, like manipulating the drama to create a change in setting, use of space and rhythm. The pace of scenes can also be altered just as various dramatic elements within one small section of a performance.

#### *4.6 Mood*

This is the tone of a performance. It is the aura or atmosphere and is often created through a combination of several dramatic and stagecraft elements working together with one another. The mood of a drama is relatively linked with human's everyday feelings such as pity, argues, desire or confidence. It can be created through sound, movement, lighting, setting, rhythm, contrast, conflict and more.

#### *4.7 Space*

This refers to the effective use of available space in a performance. Various degrees of space are used by the performers or actors like sitting, lying down, crawling, running or bending over. Using the space may mean downstage and upstage, walking in or on a stage set. In order to effectively use the space effectively, movement becomes an important factor. Use of space also implies clearly communicating to the audience where the action is taken place. This may include any changes in location that may occur in the performance. This is useful if little or no sets or props are used and the audience is hugely expected to use their imagination.

#### *4.8 Language:*

Language use in drama can be verbal or non-verbal, that is body language. It is the spoken text. It is the written script been interpreted in performance. While it is normally spoken by actors, it can also be sung or chanted. It can also be gibberish in nature for the purpose of effects. The choice of language in a dramatic performance is crucial as it forms a major means of communicating the storyline of the drama to the audience. Effective language use in drama by a performer is also determined by the actor's expressive voice skills.

#### *4.9 Sounds and climax*

This is useful in creating mood or atmosphere. Performers and their bodies can construct effective sound in performance. Some props can also create sound effects that can be useful during a live show. Some drama will have one or more crises in the development of the plot. A crisis is an important moment of dramatic tension and conflict in the play, which usually occur between two or more characters and having serious implications for the outcome of the plot. The zenith or highest point of this crisis is the climax. The drama most times gears towards resolving the crises and this mostly centers around the chief actor.

#### *4.10 Symbol and conflict*

Props provide symbols which have objects they represent in real life or everyday life. For example, a cross symbolizes Christianity while red and white cloths and white chinks symbolize idolatry. This means that when these objects are brought on the stage, the audience already knows what they symbolize and understand what they are expected to understand. This is to say that symbols can also be found in the use of color. For example black is often taken as evil and darkness, white – purity and innocence, red - anger. A particular gesture performed by an actor can be repeated later in a different context and have a very difficult meaning, this is due to

the relationship between gesture and movement and this is the most sophisticated use of symbol. When used only once, a gesture can also be a powerful symbol. George Bernard once said, 'No conflict, no drama'. Any drama that lacks conflict is usually dull and uninspiring. Conflict is an essential ingredient for all dramatic performances. It can be between two or more characters or just one character which is often referred to Inner Conflict. Conflict on stage can be verbal, physical and non-verbal/psychological. This is quite different from tension because it is a fixed part of the structure of a play with characters destined to clash with one another from the beginning of the drama.

## 5. Conclusion

The study has looked at drama and theatre and two entities that can not be separated from each other. They are dependent on each other. In the traditional setting, people gather wherever they set aside, collectively, to appreciate drama. In this setting, people may gather around leaving a circle-like space in front of them for the performers. Or, they may have an already elevated platform where performers perform while the audience/people take the lower platform from where they have a vintage view of the stage. Although, the theatre is modernized these days, it is still attached to drama. They can not totally be separated.

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